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SUBJECT: "SOUND OF EUROPE" CONFERENCE: THE EU IN ANALYSIS

¶11. SUMMARY: Austrian Chancellor (and current chairman of the European Council) Wolfgang Schuessel invited more than 400 European political and cultural personalities to a January 27-28 conference on the "Sound of Europe." The conference, which took place in Salzburg, examined the European identity and the future of Europe. The conference continued attempts in 2004 by the Dutch EU Presidency to conduct a cultural/philosophical discussion on Europe. In their analysis of what ails the EU, participants voiced various diagnoses. EU Commission President Jose Manuel Barroso and several others argued the EU was not in crisis. High Representative Javier Solana commented that there had been a crisis, but the EU was now rebounding. Some euro-skeptical intellectuals saw little chance for success of the "EU project," arguing it was too removed from EU citizens. Participants included Commission VP Margot Wallstroem, RelEx Commissioner Benita Ferrero-Waldner, French PM Dominique de Villepin, Dutch PM Jan Peter Balkenende, Finnish PM Matti Vanhanen, Latvian President Vaira Vike-Freiberga, and other European political, cultural and intellectual leaders. Ambassador McCaw attended the conference as well. End Summary.

Diagnosing the EU's Problem

¶12. Many speakers said the EU's primary problem was that it had raised the expectations of its citizens to a level it could not meet. Europeans had forgotten the EU's success in forging peace and democracy in Europe. They were now afraid of the dominance of a centralized EU, particularly in the economic area. People feared that they, and their national and local governments, were losing influence in the decision-making process. As a solution, panelists proposed more emphasis on the "subsidiarity" principle (i.e., devolving decisions to national or regional governments), and better, simpler and more direct communication with European citizens.

EU Reform

¶13. In his opening speech, Schuessel urged participants to examine and analyze the unease among European citizens, which he saw in the rejection of the EU Constitution. French Prime Minister Dominique de Villepin, who delivered the keynote speech on January 27, stressed that Europe should resume the debate on its future. He asserted that France had not said "no" to Europe, but was simply expressing the fears and concerns of many in Europe. He felt it was now evident that Europe had rushed to enlargement without sufficiently deepening and strengthening its institutions, especially on the economic side. The EU had been built "in

reverse," defined more by motion than by limits.

¶4. EU High Representative Javier Solana noted 2005 had been a difficult year, but the EU was now rebounding and had demonstrated that it could make decisions "at 25." He said the EU was now more forward-looking and pragmatic. The economy was also improving, but the EU had to sustain this. He thought it essential to restate the case for Europe in clear, simple terms, noting that member states together could shape the global agenda; alone, they could not. In order to have a Europe that delivers, the EU needed the efficiency of institutions which the draft Constitution envisioned. Commission President Jose Manuel Barroso deplored "excessive self-criticism" in Europe. Barroso agreed with Schuessel that, despite anti-EU sentiments, citizens wanted "more Europe" in areas such as common strategies against terrorism and energy security.

European Values

¶5. The conference also celebrated the 250th birthday of Mozart in Salzburg. The conference sought to emphasize the defining identity of Europe's common cultural heritage. Speakers and panelists stressed that cultural diversity was Europe's wealth.

Foreign/Security Policy

¶6. Several participants commented on the need to strive for greater integration in the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy. French Prime Minister de Villepin mentioned the case of Iran as one where Europeans had proven that they were able to speak with one voice. EU

VIENNA 00000383 002 OF 002

High Representative Solana, noting that those outside of Europe often asked him how the EU could help, urged that the EU develop and implement a more results-oriented agenda in order to do so.

¶7. Several participants noted Europe must not define itself as an antagonist to the U.S. Finnish Parliamentary President Paavo Lipponen and Latvian President Vaira Vike-Freiberga underscored the importance of the common values which Europe and the U.S shared, and warned that Europeans were increasingly forgetting the fact that the U.S. had liberated Europe in the Second World War. Vike-Freiberga emphasized the contribution of the transatlantic link to European security and the continuing need for NATO's security umbrella.

¶8. COMMENT: Some observers criticized the elite character of the conference; others argued that it had not devoted enough attention to the European relationship to Islam. Nevertheless, the soul-searching of European political and cultural leaders provided an opportunity to brainstorm about Europe's future. While few answers emerged to the questions the speakers raised, the event contributed to the debate which the French and Dutch rejection of the EU Constitution had sparked.

McCaw